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OBSERVATIONS *on the* FIRST ACT *of* SHAKESPEAR's TEMPEST. *By a young Gentleman, an Under-graduate in the Univerſity of Dublin. Communicated by the Reverend* DIGBY MARSH, *F. T. C. D. and M. R. I. A.*

Read March 10, 1788.

AMONG literary compoſitions, ſome are directed ſolely to the *underſtanding*, others to the *paſſions* and *imagination*. To diſcover the excellencies and defects of the former belongs properly to the *logician*; the latter alone are the peculiar object of *criticiſm*. A good critic therefore muſt unite a perfect knowledge of the human heart with ſoundneſs of judgment and delicacy of taſte. For this art is chiefly valuable as it tends to lay open the conſtitution of our nature, as it traces the pleaſure or diſguſt we receive from compoſitions of genius to thoſe ſecret ſtrings in the frame of man, which ſound in harmony or diſcord according to the ſkilfulneſs of the hand that touches them. Conſidered in this view, criticiſm yields to few ſciences, in the importance of its end, the qualifications it requires, or the extenſive province which it commands. Among its various objects *dramatic poetry* ſeems

ſeems to afford the nobleſt field in which the critic can try his ſtrength; and of all dramatic poets *Shakeſpear* is entitled to peculiar attention. For the drama, as it is a repreſentation of actions and characters adapted to intereſt the paſſions, depends wholly for ſucceſs on its conformity with *nature*. And the excellence of Shakeſpear is the reſult not of art or ſtudy (which in their cloſeſt imitations of nature may be ſtill perceived to *imitate)* but of intuitive perception. In him, indeed, nature ſpeaks. Nature, like a vital principle, animates his ſcene; it is nature alone that gives to his careleſs effuſions, amidſt all their blemiſhes, that ſecret charm which ſeizes the heart, while more correct productions are regarded with indifference. The eye is quickly ſatiated with the ſmooth lawn or regular parterre; but will dwell with delight on the woods, the rocks and torrents of the uncultivated waſte.

HENCE it is, that to *reliſh* Shakeſpear's beauties may be regarded as the criterion of an undepraved *taſte*; to *analize* them, of *critical* abilities. And with critics of all ſizes Shakeſpear has abounded, from the voluminous editor to the weekly eſſayiſt. Whether he has been as fortunate in the kind as in the number of his critics, I acknowledge myſelf incompetent to decide. Among the various editions of his dramatic works I can boaſt an acquaintance with but one: the joint edition of a poet and a ſcholar. All the modern commentators are known to me only by their names, and reputation for literary talents. Had I enjoyed the advantage of their writings, doubtleſs I ſhould now have no occaſion to complain that in the poet and the ſcholar I have too often ſought in vain for the critic; while the one is content

content with directing me by a marginal diſtinction *, where I am to admire; and the other forgets his author in the triumph of learned pride over the blunders of a former commentator. The meaning of a word, or the conſtruction of a ſentence, has given birth to ample comments; while thoſe ſtrokes of nature which give Shakeſpear an abſolute power over the human breaſt, are either left unnoticed, or pointed out as the objects of unmeaning admiration. For my own part, while my ſoul is hurried along by the magic of poetry through the regions of pity, indignation, aſtoniſhment or terror; when my heart expands to graſp a ſublime image, and ſurrenders all its faculties to the guidance of a maſter's hand, at ſuch moments I cannot thank the man who forces me to deſcend to the niceties of verbal criticiſm †, or to

" * The moſt ſhining paſſages are diſtinguiſhed by *commas* in the margin; and " where the beauty lay not in particulars but in the whole, *a ſtar* is prefixed to the " ſcene." Mr. Pope's preface.

† What is generally called *verbal criticiſm* is, I believe, more properly the office of a grammarian or collator of manuſcripts than of a critic. Yet there is a ſpecies of it which has a juſt title to the name, as it does not terminate in words, however words may be its immediate object; I mean that ſpecies of criticiſm which delivers rules for the *ſtructure of ſentences*; rules to which the antients paid much more attention than moſt of our Engliſh writers; and which many, I believe, have neglected as inapplicable to modern languages. Whether this opinion be founded in truth I ſhall not here enquire; but the reaſon why I look upon this ſubject to involve in ſome meaſure the conſtitution of the human mind, and therefore to fall under the critic's province, will appear by an example. I ſhall take it from the 2d philippic of Cicero, in which the following ſentence occurs: " *Utinam, Cn. Pompei, cum C. Cæſare* " *ſocietatem, aut nunquam coiſſes, aut nunquam diremiſſes, fuit alterum gravitatis, alterum* " *prudentiæ tuæ.*" In one of our Engliſh tranſlations it runs thus: " I wiſh, O " Pompey, that you never had contracted, or never had broken your friendſhip with " Cæſar.

to unimportant altercations about a phraſe in which ſtudy is requiſite to diſcover obſcurity. Who, indeed, while rapt in the harmony of Handel, can liſten with patience to remarks on the ſtructure of the inſtrument or dreſs of the performer? Here and there, indeed, (even in the edition I ſpeak of) an obſervation truly

" Cæſar. The one had been conſiſtent with your patriotiſm, the other with your " prudence." There is no one who reads theſe two ſentences that will not immediately give a decided preference to the original. But a reaſon for this preference may be required, and muſt be deduced from nature. Let us compare the ſeveral parts of each. " *Utinam, Cn. Pompeî!*" Our attention is awakened by the ſolemnity of this opening, and the dignity of the perſon who is addreſſed; while the cold " *I wiſh,*" of the tranſlation, prepares us for a wiſh of equal importance with *my uncle Toby's*— " I wiſh, ſaid my uncle Toby—I wiſh, Trim, *I was aſleep.*" After we have learned that the ſpeaker is expreſſing a wiſh, we naturally expect to be informed of the ſubject of this wiſh. And this the Roman orator tells us in the next words, " *cum C. Cæſare ſocietatem.*" After which the wiſh itſelf is declared, when the mind is enabled to judge of its propriety, " *aut nunquam coiſſes, aut nunquam diremiſſes.*" But the tranſlator, inverting this order, informs us that *ſomething* ſhould never have been contracted or never broken; and then tells us what this *ſomething* is. So that after the concluſion of the ſentence, we muſt *go back* to conſider the juſtice of the ſpeaker's ſentiment. In the original the ſentence is cloſed with that on which the mind ſhould dwell: in the tranſlation, the attention is called off from this to a particular which ought to have been known before. In the confirmation which is ſubjoined, the concluding word implies an artful compliment, wiſely intended to efface thoſe diſagreeable ſenſations which might have been excited by the preceding reproof. This alſo is loſt in the tranſlation. The language of the antients was certainly more favourable than ours to ſuch delicacies of arrangement. Yet I believe our language is not ſo much in fault as our negligence. The preſent ſentence might be tranſlated to more advantage thus: " That union with Cæſar—would to heaven, Cn. Pompey! either " that you never had formed or never had diſſolved it. The one was the part of " dignity—the other of prudence—ſuch as your's."

truly critical appears; but appears like the ſolitary ſhrub in a barren deſert—a memento of the ſurrounding waſte. In the *Tempeſt*, where ſuch remarks occur moſt frequently, they are yet ſcattered with ſuch a niggard hand as will by no means ſatisfy the reader who deſires to inveſtigate the ſource of thoſe feelings which are excited in every page of a favourite poet. That deſire gave birth to the following pages in the hours of relaxation from ſeverer ſtudies. And that deſire, it is hoped, will at leaſt avert the ſeverity of cenſure from an attempt which muſt fall indeed far ſhort of meriting applauſe.

THE firſt thing which claims our attention in this play is the *opening*. This is a part in which of all others it is moſt difficult to ſucceed. And accordingly we find it generally unnatural and almoſt always languid. It is a part to which, when we liſten moſt favourably, we liſten with cold indifference, and in which the poet's higheſt ambition ſeems to be to inform the underſtanding, not to affect the heart. That it is no eaſy taſk to attain even this end without diſguſting by frequent tranſgreſſions of nature and probability, we may be convinced from the number and eminence of thoſe who have failed in the attempt. Hence on the antient ſtage, even after it had made large advances towards perfection, the *prologue* frequently gave ſuch information to the audience, as was neceſſary for underſtanding the ſucceeding ſcenes. And to me indeed this cuſtom appears far preferable to that of attaching an aukward introduction to the body of the drama. Nor do I ſee why we ſhould ſtill retain the prologue, yet reject the principal advantage which may be derived from its introduction. That painting, no doubt, is moſt excellent

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which explains itſelf; but not by a label iſſuing from the mouth of the portrait. In fact thoſe prefatory ſcenes are appendages perfectly diſtinct from the play, of which they no more conſtitute a part than ſuch a label is part of the figure to which it is affixed. For that alone can properly be ſaid to belong to the drama, which tends in ſome degree to accelerate the cataſtrophe. This is the bond which muſt unite the ſeveral members into one uniform whole. And where this bond is wanting, any other that can be ſubſtituted muſt be equally ridiculous and vain. The attempt to incorporate diſcordant parts can only ſerve to raiſe our laughter or diſguſt. Some however of the antient prologues told too much; for the end of information is ſufficiently anſwered, when we *know* ſo much as may qualify us for taking part in the various incidents which the poet repreſents, and at the ſame time *are ignorant* of ſo much as will keep alive our deſire of knowing more. There is a point between too much and too little knowledge, from which a deviation on either ſide muſt tend to repreſs curioſity or anticipate conjecture.

But though I wiſh that the antient prologue ſhould take place of thoſe forced ſoliloquies and improbable dialogues which have been the diſgrace of the ſtage; and though I think that in the management of it, no ſmall degree of judgment may be ſhewn; yet that drama which aſpires to perfection, muſt aſpire at the ſame time to *independence*—muſt be ſomething in itſelf abſolute, and unindebted to the aſſiſtance of an interpreter. For the knowledge which we collect ourſelves always yields more ſatisfaction than that which we derive from others. To effect this, indeed, an uncommon felicity in the fable muſt concur in ſome meaſure with

with the art of the poet: And I believe each of theſe no where appears more eminent than in the Tempeſt of Shakeſpear. There in the very firſt ſcene the attention is arreſted, the paſſions intereſted, the mind hurried into *action* where ſhe recognizes nature, and is unable to remain an indifferent ſpectator. A ſhip appears at ſea in a ſtorm. The paſſengers are diſcovered to be noble; but diſtinctions of rank are loſt in danger: The great then feel their dependance on the meaneſt, and the meaneſt become ſenſible of their own importance. Hence it is that the boatſwain dwells with pleaſure on the reflection, that "*theſe roarers care* "*not for the name of king*;" and that power and wiſdom are now of no avail. Hence that contemptuous ſuperiority with which he replies to the ſoothing admonitions of Gonzalo, and which muſt naturally ariſe from the conſciouſneſs that a monarch's ſafety depended upon him. The paſſengers, as ſoon as they have diſcarded hope, give vent to all the impatience of deſpair. The terror which had firſt ſeized them now ſpreads among the mariners. The deſpair becomes general. All is given up for loſt. The ſhip ſplits, and we are for awhile left in a ſtate of anxiety and ſuſpenſe.

We may obſerve the diſtinctive manners of an old man maintained in the cautions of Gonzalo; the ſatisfaction he takes in the ſagacity of his own remarks, and his reliance on their juſtice even in the extremity of danger. But I haſten to a more ſignal inſtance of Shakeſpear's inſight into the human mind. The greateſt difficulty in the conduct of this drama conſiſted in reconciling us to the marvellous, with which the play abounds; and which in the hands of any other poet muſt, inſtead of raiſing admiration,

admiration, have only ſhocked belief. How judiciouſly therefore is the imagination prepared by terror and compaſſion for the enchanted ſcenes to which we are now to be introduced. It is a common obſervation that the weakeſt minds are moſt inclined to credulity. And it is no leſs true that fear, grief, pity, and all thoſe paſſions which tend to depreſs the ſoul, produce (in proportion to their violence) a ſimilar effect. Hence the numerous prodigies with which hiſtorians abound, in times of danger and diſtreſs. Hence that proneneſs to ſuperſtition which has appeared in the greateſt characters, when oppreſſed by the ſhock of any ſudden calamity. To be convinced of the importance of this remark, let us only conſider how differently we ſhould have been affected by the appearance of Proſpero and his ſpirits, had not the awfulneſs of a ſtorm and ſhipwreck preceded their introduction. Should we not have turned with diſguſt from that which at preſent only fills us with aſtoniſhment?

THE poet now tranſports us to the cave of an enchanter, whoſe potent art had "*called forth the mutinous winds.*" His daughter beſeeching him to allay the ſtorm to which ſhe had been witneſs, is comforted with the aſſurance that no life was loſt, and that what was done, was done "*in care of her.*" The plot gradually opens in a manner natural, ſolemn and affecting. "*The hour was now come,*" when Proſpero's daughter muſt be informed of that which to have known before would have been both uſeleſs and prejudicial. We become every moment more intereſted in the fortunes of Miranda and her father. The one, who at firſt only excited ſurpriſe and awe as a magician, now claims our pity and reſpect, as a prince unjuſtly diſpoſſeſſed of his

his dominions by the treachery of a brother. And the averſion with which we are apt to regard the character of an enchanter, is loſt in that of a man "*rapt in ſecret ſtudies*," and devoted to the love of letters. Still had ſuch a perſon been repreſented in the midſt of civilized ſociety, the fiction perhaps would have been looked upon as incredible. But in ſolitude, in the loneſome uninhabited waſte, and in darkneſs, (that temporary ſolitude) men have ever been forward to embrace the wildeſt deluſions of fancy. For this reaſon Shakeſpear lays his ſcene in a deſert iſland; where, before Proſpero's arrival, no human being had trod except an exiled ſorcereſs.

MIRANDA from the beginning appears in the true feminine charms of ſoftneſs, compaſſion and ſimplicity. She is now preſented in the more intereſting view of rightful heir to her father's dukedom, and companion of his ſufferings. Our curioſity alſo is ſtill kept alive: Proſpero's enemies are now in his power: his fate depends on ſeizing this opportunity; but in what manner he will ſeize it we remain uncertain. Thus is Shakeſpear equally judicious in what he diſcloſes and conceals. Longinus admires an expreſſion of Herodotus. "*The whole theatre was melted into* "*tears.*" Similar to this, but much more noble, is Shakeſpear's:

> "No, not ſo much perdition as an hair
> "Betid to any creature *in the veſſel,*
> "*Which thou heard'ſt cry.*"

How cloſely too does he imitate nature, even in the circumſtance which he ſelects for Miranda's remembrance, namely, the number of her attendants. That, by the frequency of repetition, muſt have

have made a ſtronger impreſſion on her memory than the ſingle event of her tranſportation to the iſland, the importance of which her infant mind was incapable of knowing. But let us leave theſe remarks to conſider the miniſtering ſpirit who is now exhibited.

PRÆTERNATURAL agents, however they may ſurpriſe, ſeldom intereſt us. The difference of their nature, paſſions and purſuits, makes us regard them as an order of beings in whom we have no concern. It remained for Shakeſpear to give them ſuch characters as muſt excite our love or abhorrence, ſuch ſentiments and manners as never intrude upon thoſe of the human ſpecies, yet force us to ſympathize in their pleaſure and their pains. The ſpirit now introduced at once lays hold on our affections; its character is immediately diſcovered, and is ſuch a character as we cannot contemplate with indifference. Proſpero himſelf is, with the greateſt propriety, repreſented as loving it. Delicate, gentle, timid and ſubmiſſive, it executes the commands of its employer with an alacrity quickened by gratitude, and by the expectation of promiſed liberty. But whence is it that we are more intereſted by Shakeſpear's Ariel, than by the attending ſpirits in Milton's Comus? I anſwer, becauſe the former has paſſions ſimilar to our own, burns with deſire, or exults in hope; chearfully ſubmits to bondage from motives of generoſity, yet at the ſame time feels the wretchedneſs of bondage, and pants for the enjoyment of freedom. But of the latter, we only know that they are ſent to ſuccour virtue in diſtreſs; that they diſcharge their commiſſion with cold apathy; that they enjoy unruffled happineſs themſelves, and look down upon the perturbations and cares which agitate

mortals.

mortals. What emotion, but that of reverence, can be excited by a character which is itſelf exempt from all? Hence we may obſerve that if at any time ſpiritual agents be repreſented, they ſhould be of a middle order, ſubject to various degrees of pleaſure and of pain. Human paſſions are moſt of them founded on the imperfections of our nature, and nothing that is perfect can become their proper object.

But to return to our author. Ariel's impatience for freedom gives Proſpero a natural opportunity of recounting what had paſſed upon his firſt coming to the iſland, and prepares us for the appearance of Caliban. Mean while the ſtory continues to be unfolded, or rather unfolds itſelf. We become acquainted with the principal actors; we learn a more particular account of the king's fate and his followers; and at the ſame time, leſt curioſity ſhould be weakened, the poet artfully heightens our ſuſpenſe by the *ſecret commiſſion* given to Ariel. In this ſcene a ſignal inſtance occurs of Shakeſpear's accuracy in adapting his language to the different perſonages he exhibits. The ſpirit informing its maſter of the harbour in which the king's ſhip is concealed, inſtead of deſcribing it from the ſituation, or the nature of the place, marks it out by a circumſtance ſuitable to its own character:

——————— " Where once
" Thou call'dſt me up at midnight to fetch dew
" From the ſtill-vext Bermoothes."

Such an incidental reference to a preceding event tends to corroborate thoſe which are now repreſented, and inſenſibly perſuades us of their reality.

We come now to a character the moſt extraordinary, moſt ſtrongly marked, and uniformly ſupported, that imagination has ever pictured or language deſcribed. The ſtubborn, the malignant, the ungrateful Caliban, forms a perfect contraſt to the amiable, the gentle Ariel. Unmoved by kindneſs, fear alone makes him ſubmit to the power of Proſpero, whom he at once deteſts and dreads. His malevolence breaks out the moment he appears in the bitterneſs of imprecation — that greateſt pleaſure which he derives from the uſe of ſpeech. Liberty he deſires no farther than as it affords an exemption from labour, and where ſervility promiſes the gratification of his indolence or his malice he is eager to be a ſlave. But though we muſt admire the ſtrength and juſtneſs of colouring with which this character is drawn; yet, I fear, the introduction of it muſt be condemned, as deſtructive to the unity of a drama, which might otherwiſe have been pronounced complete. It is a ſhining blemiſh which we can ſcarcely wiſh removed; and I think it confirms a remark that has often occurred to me in reading Shakeſpear, namely, " that many of his defects proceed from " too cloſe an imitation of nature." Nor does this contradict the great rule, that nature ſhould be the ſtandard of dramatic poetry. We muſt diſtinguiſh between what is natural in events, and what is conſonant to the nature of the human mind. The latter muſt be univerſally obſerved, as the chief object of the drama is to affect the paſſions. But the former is to be ſtudied only

only in ſubſervience to this, which therefore it muſt never be ſuffered to counteract. Thus in *real life* we ſcarcely ever ſee any train of events uniformly tending to one end, without the intervention of others, between which and that end there ſubſiſts no neceſſary connection. Yet the *unity of action* ought always to be maintained by the dramatic poet; becauſe the human mind is moſt powerfully intereſted, when the force of all its faculties is concentered in a ſingle object. Shakeſpear has often deviated from this rule, and abounds with faults; but ſeldom deviates from nature, and therefore abounds with beauties. Hence many even of his faults carry that charm along with them, which more than atones for their imperfection.

But Ariel is now introduced again, in the execution of Proſpero's commiſſion; drawing Ferdinand to the ſight of Miranda by the ſound of aerial muſic. She, accuſtomed to the appearance of ſpirits under various forms, naturally ſuppoſes that a figure uncommonly beautiful is not human; yet his appearance is ſo intereſting that ſhe plainly wiſhes her conjecture may be falſe.

——— "What is't? *A ſpirit?*
——— "Believe me, Sir,
"It carries a brave form—*but 'tis a ſpirit.*"

The natural ſimplicity of Miranda's character is uniformly maintained. She attempts not to diſſemble the partiality which ſhe feels for Ferdinand. It is a falſe refinement that will uſe a veil where there is nothing which deſerves concealment. Proſpero's ſeeming oppoſition to a connection which he wiſhed to bring about, is founded on the juſteſt obſervation of nature. Difficulties

in the attainment of an object which has once engaged our deſires, have been ever found to encreaſe the ardour of purſuit. Beſides, the roughneſs of his demeanour and his apparent cruelty tend to ſet the tenderneſs and gentle ſympathy of his daughter in a more engaging light; ſo that we can ſcarcely wonder at the ſuddenneſs of Ferdinand's attachment. Yet let the advocates for firſt-ſight impreſſions obſerve, that *Shakeſpear* ſuppoſed all theſe concurring circumſtances inſufficient, and has called in *ſupernatural influence* to effect what *they* think may be ſufficiently accounted for by their "*Je ne ſcai quos*"—that *John-a-Stiles* of modern novel-writing.

WARBURTON's remarks on the remainder of this ſcene ſupercede the neceſſity of any farther criticiſms. I ſhall therefore conclude, after obſerving, in general, with what peculiar art the cataſtrophe of this piece is conducted. In order to the recovery of Proſpero's dukedom, Alonzo was to be impreſſed with remorſe for having been the author of his depoſition. For this purpoſe he is viſited with accumulated misfortune. And leſt the voice of that ſtern monitor ſhould be ineffectual, the agency of Ariel is employed to ſet his guilt before him in the ſtrongeſt colours; 'till at length he ſees and trembles at the characters of divine vengeance. The billows, the winds, the thunder, ſound in his ears "*the name of Proſpero*;" and he is ſtung to frenzy by the reflection that, for his father's treſpaſs, Ferdinand is "*bedded in the ooze.*" When his diſtraction is now at the height, the charm diſſolves. The king's affliction for the loſs of his ſon is changed to tranſport for his recovery. Tranſport, ſuch as his, kindles all the ardour of affection for the moſtdiſtant inſtrument.

inſtrument. The happy parent is naturally led to regard Proſpero as the author of his joy. All remains of former enmity are effaced ; and leſt it ſhould ever break out again, their reconciliation is cemented by the union of their children.

AMONG Shakeſpear's plays it is not eaſy to determine which is moſt excellent. Perhaps the *Tempeſt* has fewer faults than any other, and as ſtriking beauties. There is not one, certainly, in which the poet gives a greater looſe to the vivid powers of his imagination, nor one in which his imagination is more regulated by the ſtricteſt rules of nature and of art.